

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



Yondorf Block and Hall

758 W. North Avenue

Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, February 7, 2001



CITY OF CHICAGO
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
Alicia Mazur Berg, Commissioner



Above: Contrary to popular belief, the "L" was not designed to avoid the Yondorf Block and Hall. The track's weaving route, instead, was determined by existing alley rights-of-way, as seen in this detail from a 1958 photograph.

Cover: Its rich detailing makes the Yondorf Block and Hall an excellent—and rare surviving—example of a Victorian-era public hall building.

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968. The Commission is responsible for recommending to the City Council which individual buildings, sites, objects or districts should be designated as Chicago Landmarks.

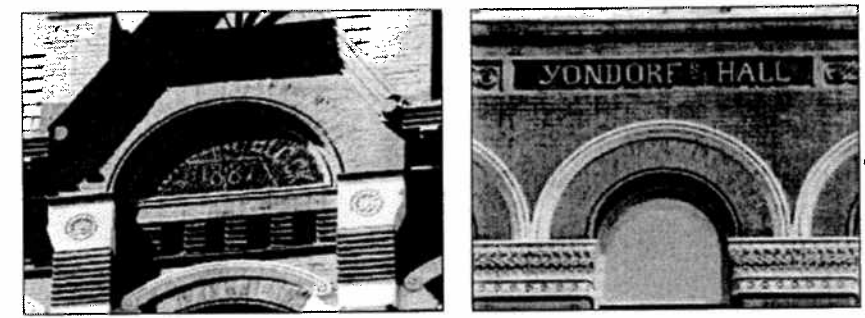
The Commission makes its recommendations to the City Council following a detailed designation process. It begins with a staff report on the historical and architectural background and significance of the proposed landmark. The next step is a vote by the Landmarks Commission as to whether the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration. Not only does this preliminary vote initiate the formal designation process, but it places the review of city permits for the property under the jurisdiction of the Commission until the final landmark recommendation is acted on by the City Council.

Please note that this landmark designation report is subject to possible revision during the designation process. Only language contained within the designation ordinance recommended to the City Council should be regarded as final.

Yondorf Block and Hall

758 W. North Avenue

Built: 1887
 Architect: Frederick Ahlschlager

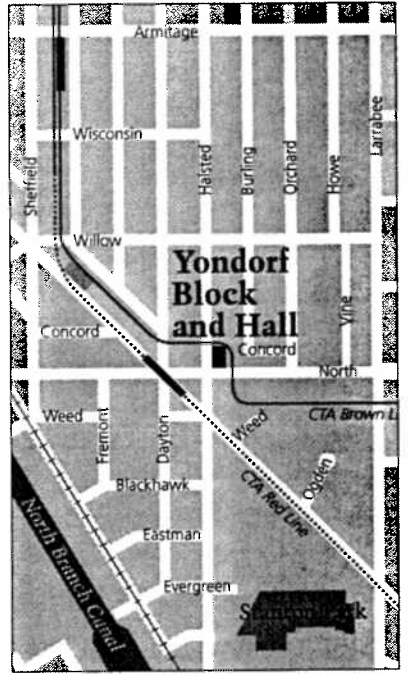


In its appearance and historic use, the Yondorf Block and Hall represents an important part of the history of Victorian-era Chicago, as well as a rare survivor of one of the city's most prominent German-American commercial districts.

Built at the corner of North and Halsted, this four-story commercial "block" was built to include stores at ground level and a large "public hall" and smaller meeting rooms on upper floors. These public halls were plentiful in turn-of-the-century Chicago, serving as combination community centers and theater spaces. However, few of these buildings remain intact today.

The Yondorf Block and Hall also ranks as one of the city's best surviving examples of a large-scale Victorian commercial building. In true Victorian fashion, its architectural design is a mix of various styles, building forms, and ornament, all executed with a cheerful disdain for visual restraint. Its dark-red brick walls are accented with light gray limestone, demonstrating the influence of the Victorian Gothic, while rows of round-arched windows, bold in form and repetition, are characteristic of the Richardsonian Romanesque style.

Finally, the Yondorf Block and Hall stands at the edge of the Lincoln Park community, almost the lone survivor of the forces of change that transformed the area following World War II. Urban blight, followed by urban renewal, have removed most of the other historic buildings along North Avenue. The prominence of the Yondorf Block and Hall makes it a visual landmark, whether seen from street level or from the Chicago Transit Authority elevated train tracks that curve around the building.



Evidence of Yondorf's origins as a commercial "block" structure can be seen in one of its rooftop gables (far left). A terra cotta panel (middle left) bears the name of the building's two-story theater "hall."

Above: a map showing the building's location at the corner of North and Halsted.

In this c.1895 photograph, the original Yondorf Brothers clothing store can be seen at left, near the corner of North and Larrabee. The temporary Classical-style columns were installed for a street pageant.



The Yondorf Brothers

August and Charles Yondorf, the builders of the Yondorf Block and Hall, were brothers who emigrated to the United States from Bavaria in the 1850s along with their German-Jewish family. The brothers were members of the prominent Sinai Congregation on Chicago's South Side. In addition, August was associated with the Chicago Hebrew Institute on West Taylor Street, while Charles belonged to the Ravinsloe Country Club and Standard Club, two of the city's most elite Jewish clubs.

In 1872, the two entered business together, starting the Yondorf Brothers clothing store. By 1887, the year that the Yondorf Block and Hall was constructed, the brothers owned two stores, one on Blue Island Avenue in the city's Lower West Side and the other at Larrabee and North, in the center of the city's premier German-American shopping street.

The Yondorf Block and Hall was constructed four blocks west of their North Avenue store, at the northeast corner of North and Halsted, close to the streets' intersection with the diagonal Clybourn Avenue. Designed by Frederick Ahlschlager, it was a public hall building, a common building type in most Chicago neighborhoods during the late 19th century. Like other hall buildings, Yondorf housed stores on the first floor, while upper floors contained meeting halls of varying size that were rented to individuals and organizations for meetings and other social events.



The largest space was Yondorf's Hall itself, a two-story theater on the second and third floors that soon became a favorite site for neighborhood social events. A Chicago newspaper, the *Inter-Ocean*, noted in its January 28, 1888, issue that the Yondorf Block and Hall was "one of the handsomest and most imposing on the North Side" and that its theater was "a favorite place of meeting, being rented out almost every night."

The Building's Architecture

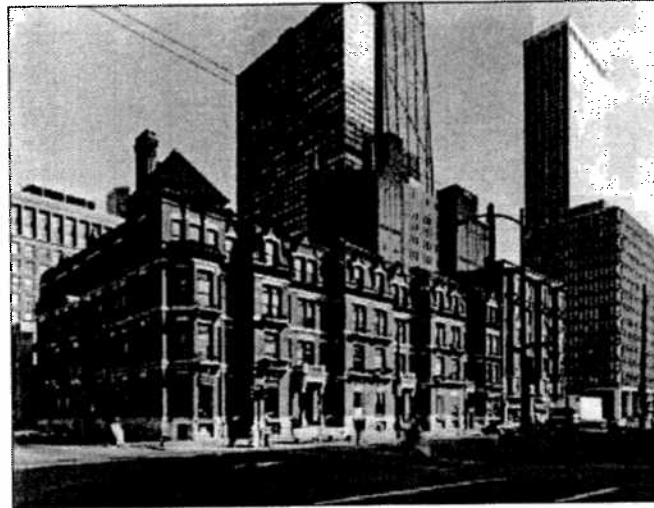
Historically, the Yondorf Block and Hall has been a visual anchor for the six-corner intersection of North, Halsted and Clybourn since its construction. Four stories in height, 57 feet wide and 125 feet long, it towered over neighboring buildings, most of which were two- and three-story-high commercial buildings. Cubic in overall form, the building is a massive presence. The North Avenue (south) and Halsted Street (west) facades feature storefronts and finely finished walls of face brick and stone. The roofline has several shallow gables and a shingle-clad false mansard roof.

The other two facades do not face public streets and therefore are less finely finished. The north elevation faces an alley and, since 1899, the Chicago Transit Authority elevated tracks. Consequently, it is faced with common brick. Most window openings on this facade have been filled with brick, but retain their original lintels. The east facade originally formed a common-brick party wall with an adjacent two-story commercial building (later demolished).

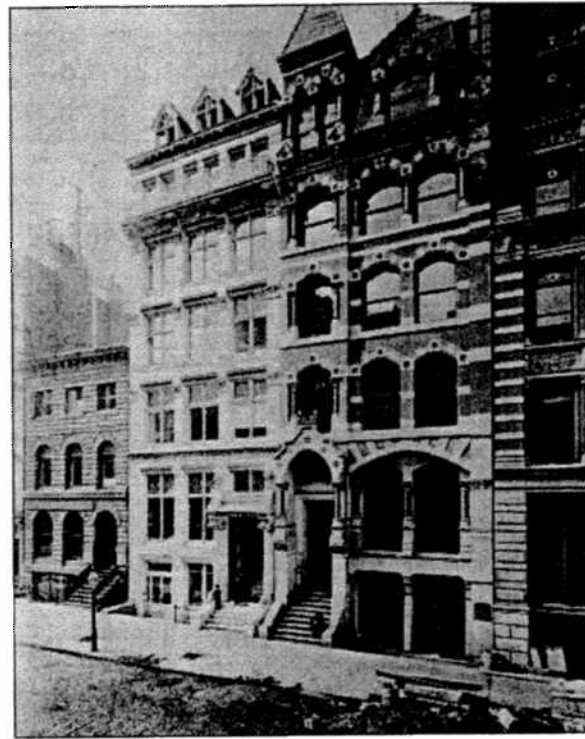
A four-story addition to this facade, built in 1989, houses elevators and stairs for the building. This addition is designed in a modern style that contrasts with the historic building but also defers to it through a setback and the use of compatible red brick.



The Yondorf Block and Hall, shown looking north on Halsted Street (top), is one of very few large-scale, 19th-century buildings remaining in the area. Its unfinished north facade, shown above in the mid-1980s, is bordered by an "L" structure built in 1899.



Contrasting colors and materials are key characteristics of the Victorian Gothic—and of the Yondorf Block and Hall. Two other examples of this style are (left): Hotel St. Benedict Flats (1883), at Wabash and Chicago avenues, and the Queens Insurance Co. Building (1877) in New York City.

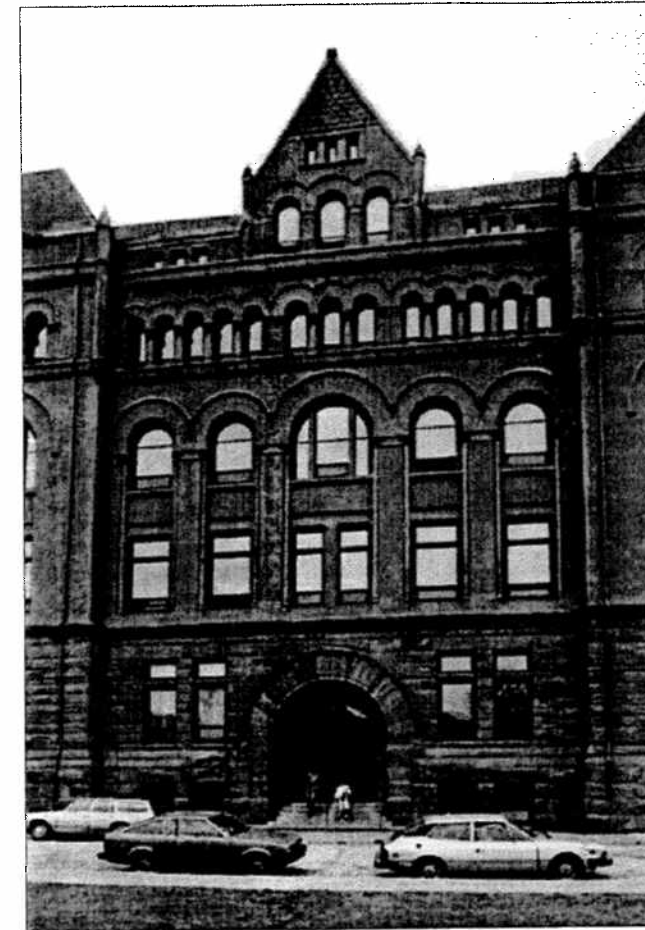


Victorian Eclecticism

In its stylistic eclecticism and profuse ornament, the Yondorf Block and Hall is a splendid example of the kind of commercial building that Victorian-era Chicagoans favored. Chicago grew rapidly during the late 19th century and many neighborhoods were built up with buildings that, like Yondorf, displayed a mixture of architectural styles and decoration. However, most buildings that remain from these years are modest in scale. Only a handful, including the Hotel St. Benedict Flats (1882-83) at 40-52 E. Chicago Ave. (designated a Chicago Landmark in 1996) and the former Armour Institute main building (1891-93) at 33rd and Federal streets, can match the Yondorf Block and Hall's size and sense of visual presence.

The Yondorf Block and Hall is a fine synthesis of two architectural styles popular during the period, Victorian Gothic and Richardsonian Romanesque. It also contains ornament, based on plant motifs rendered in a hard-edged, geometric manner, that shows the influence of early modern architectural design.

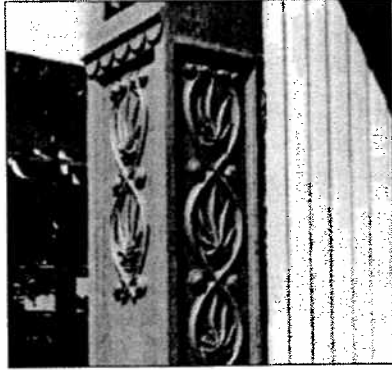
Victorian Gothic, popular in the 1860s through 1880s, combined Gothic shapes and forms with a highly polychromatic use of building materials. Although the Yondorf Block and Hall does not display Gothic detailing, its striking contrast of deep red brick walls and pale gray limestone trim is characteristic of Victorian Gothic buildings.



Another influence on the design of the Yondorf Block and Hall is the Richardsonian Romanesque, which featured round-arched windows and bold masonry work. Two prominent local examples of this style are: the since-demolished Marshall Field Wholesale Store (1886; above) and Armour Institute (1893), at 33rd and Federal streets.

Richardsonian Romanesque, a fashionable building style in Chicago during the late 1880s and early 1890s, was named for Henry Hobson Richardson, a prominent architect of the period who adapted the Romanesque architecture of 11th- and 12th-century France and Spain into a personal style of rough-cut stone walls, round-arched windows and doors, and bold foliate ornament. The Yondorf Block and Hall's rows of round-arched windows, prominent transoms and carved stone detailing are very reminiscent of Richardson's personal style, making the building an excellent example of the adaptation of his style by a Chicago architect.

In addition, the Yondorf Block and Hall contains decoration that reveals Ahlschlager's interest in early modern ornament. Progressive architects during the last quarter of the 19th century were striving to develop architectural styles suitable for the modern, industrialized society that America was becoming. Architectural ornament not based on historic styles such as Classicism was seen as an essential component of these new styles. One design approach was the creation of ornament based on plant motifs,



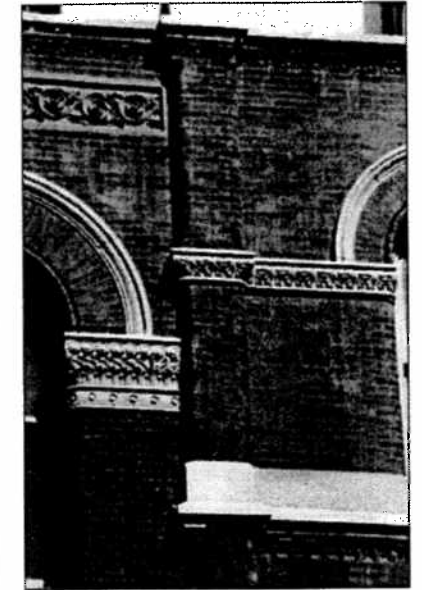
Building ornament during the late-19th century was changing from classical forms to natural plant motifs. Above, a detail from the Yondorf Block and Hall; at right, ornament from the Jewelers' Building (1882; Louis Sullivan, architect), at 19 S. Wabash Ave.



including flowers, leaves and vines. Several important architects, including Louis Sullivan in his early years, created hard-edged, strongly geometric foliate ornament. Ahlschlager used a similar type of ornament for the Yondorf Block and Hall's storefronts and for some of the molded-brick and pressed-metal ornament that details the building's walls and gables.

A Confection of Materials and Craftsmanship

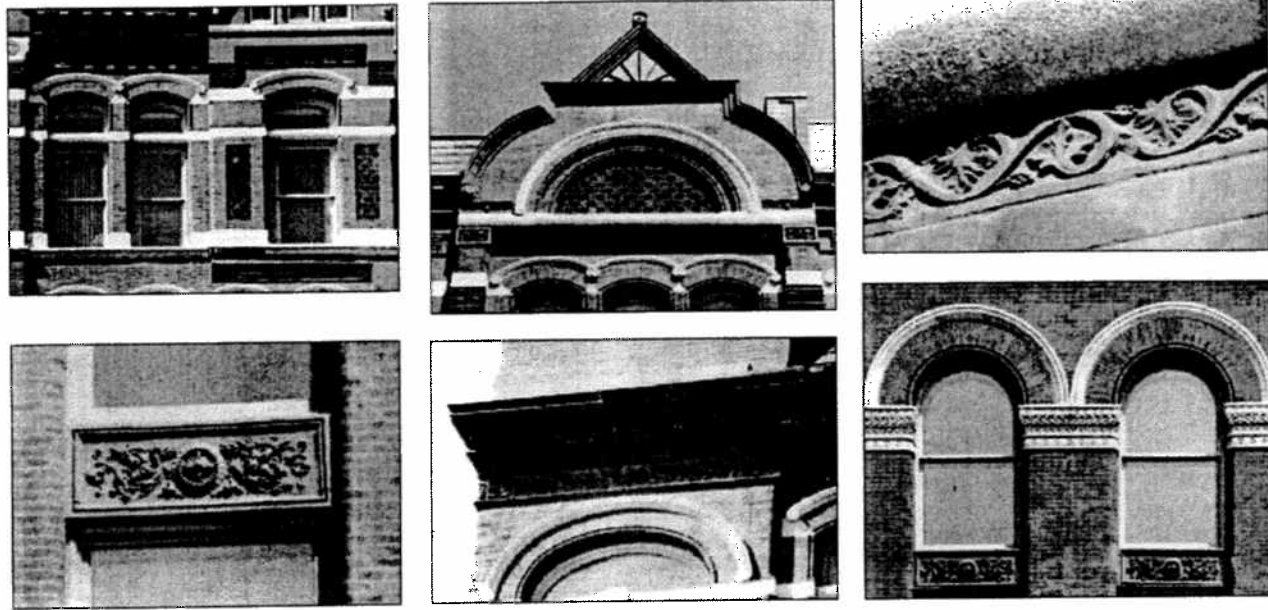
The Yondorf Block and Hall is significant due to its excellent use of materials and craftsmanship. It is an exuberant confection of contrasting shapes, colors and materials characteristic of Victorian-era architecture at its most visually appealing. The street facades are filled with rows of two-over-two, double-hung windows in a variety of configurations, often with round- and segmental-arched transoms. These windows are typically grouped in twos and threes, separated by stone engaged columns and brick pilasters ornamented with carved stone blocks. Continuous stone sills and lintels run along both street facades, connecting these rows of windows. This contrast of dark brick walls and light stone trim, forming horizontal layers that create a "wedding cake" appearance, is one of the most striking visual characteristics of this era's architecture.



The building's contrast of dark brick walls and light stone trim creates a "wedding cake" appearance of horizontal layers, which emphasizes the mass of the Halsted Street facade (above) of the Yondorf Block and Hall. Visual interest is further heightened (right) by round-edged molded brick piers, terra cotta ornament, and alternating round, segmental, and flat arches.

In addition, the Yondorf Block and Hall displays a strong three-dimensional sense due to projecting wall sections, recessed windows, and the use of round-edged molded brick for piers, pilasters and window surrounds. At each corner of the building's street facades and above building entrances, sections of the building's upper walls project slightly outward, supported by brick corbeling and culminating with decorative rooftop gables. The building's windows are deeply set within openings, formed from rounded brick, that visually emphasize the solidity of the load-bearing walls that support the building.

The primary use of brick and stone, with their vivid contrasts of colors and textures, also distinguishes the Yondorf Block and Hall. Street facades are built of brick, made by the Anderson Pressed Brick Company of Chicago, which combines deep red color with smooth, almost satiny surfaces. In contrast, the Bedford limestone that was used for window sills and lintels, impost blocks, projecting window drip moldings, engaged columns, and other decoration is pale gray in color. In several places, especially in the thick lintels above the second-floor windows, this stone was left roughly finished, providing a bold sense of texture.

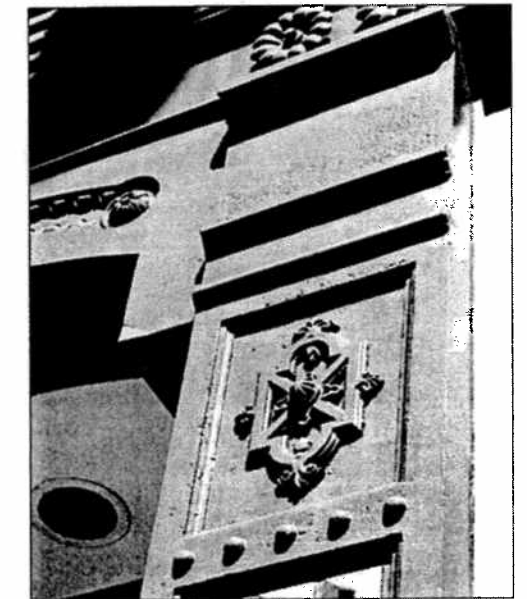
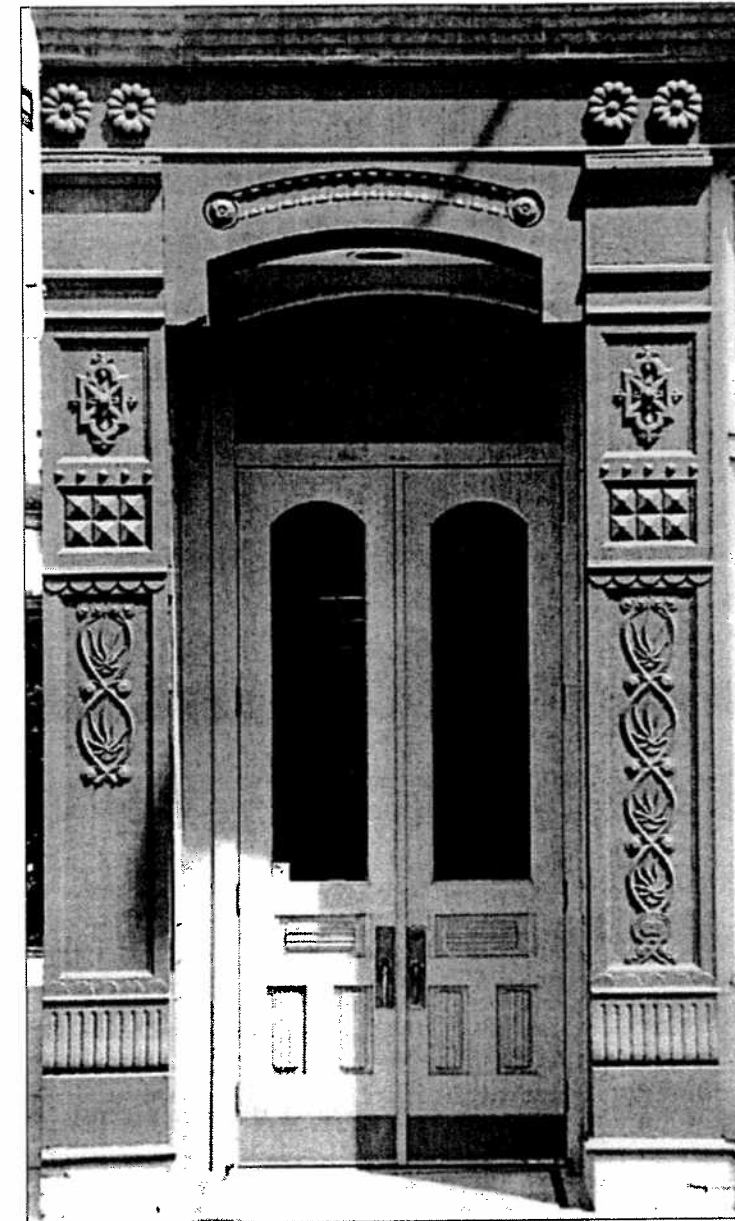


The Yondorf Block and Hall is a visual feast of ornamental details, executed in molded brick, carved limestone, terra cotta, and pressed metal.

Ornamental Details

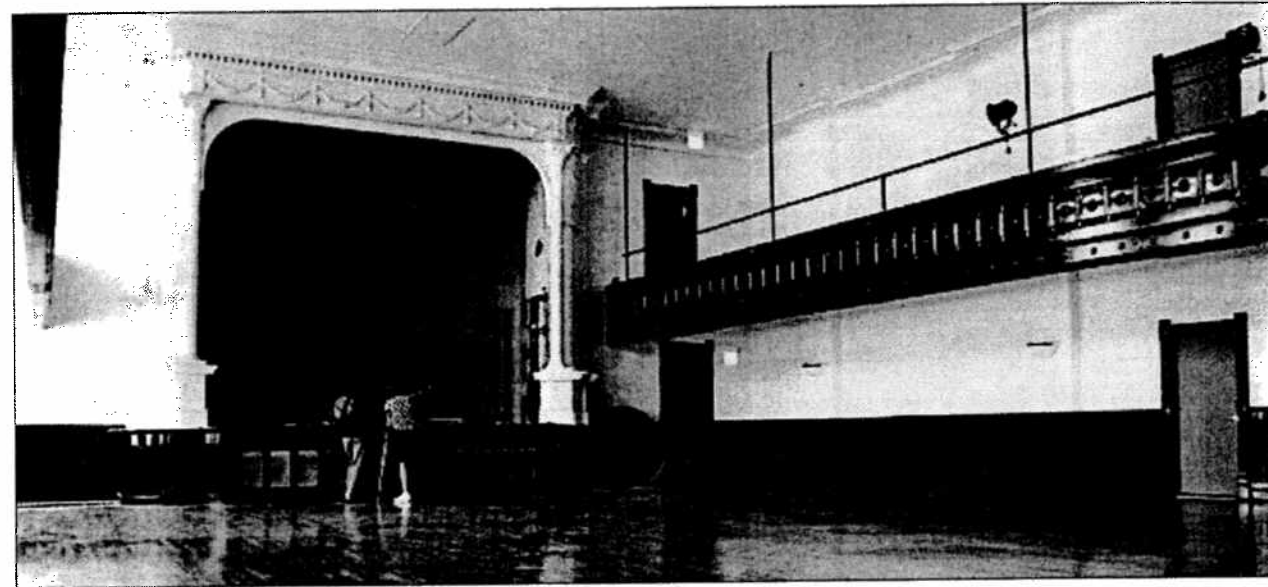
The Yondorf Block and Hall is handsomely detailed with finely-scaled ornament in a variety of materials, giving the building's wall surfaces a sense of visual delight that encourages the eye to linger. The stone lintels above second-floor windows are carved with classical Greek ornament based on honeysuckle leaves, known as anthemia. Decorative stone blocks around windows are carved with rows of hard-edged zigzag ornament and softer intertwining vines. Under the building's continuous gray limestone sills are courses of molded brick, decorated with a variety of motifs, including vines, bulls-eyes, and zigzags. Other brick ornament includes decorative patterns of projecting brick under the second-floor sill and within the building's cornice.

On the Halsted side of the Yondorf Block and Hall, unglazed red terra cotta, richly detailed with rosettes and intertwining vines, is used for the spandrel panels between the second- and third-floor windows of the building's theater. A horizontal terra-cotta plaque above these windows also is decorated with plant motifs and the name, "Yondorf's Hall." Terra cotta also is used for decorative bands, ornamented with anthemia and vines, found just below the building's cornice and for a semicircular panel within a rooftop gable on the North Avenue side, rough in texture and labeled "Yondorf Block 1887". Galvanized pressed metal is used for cornices, accented with boldly modeled brackets, and for rooftop gables decorated with sunbursts and foliate motifs.



The Halsted Street storefront retains its original 1887 appearance. The ornament surrounding the store entrance includes bold geometric and foliate patterns rendered in cast iron.

The building's storefronts are especially rich in detailing. The storefronts facing North Avenue were remodeled in 1919, but a storefront at the northwest corner of the building, facing Halsted, is original to the building's 1887 construction. It is made of cast iron and has large-scaled piers flanking more delicate colonettes. The piers are decorated with high-relief foliate ornament reminiscent of that found on early buildings by Louis Sullivan. A recessed entrance has wooden double doors, each with a single vertical pane of glass over wooden panels.



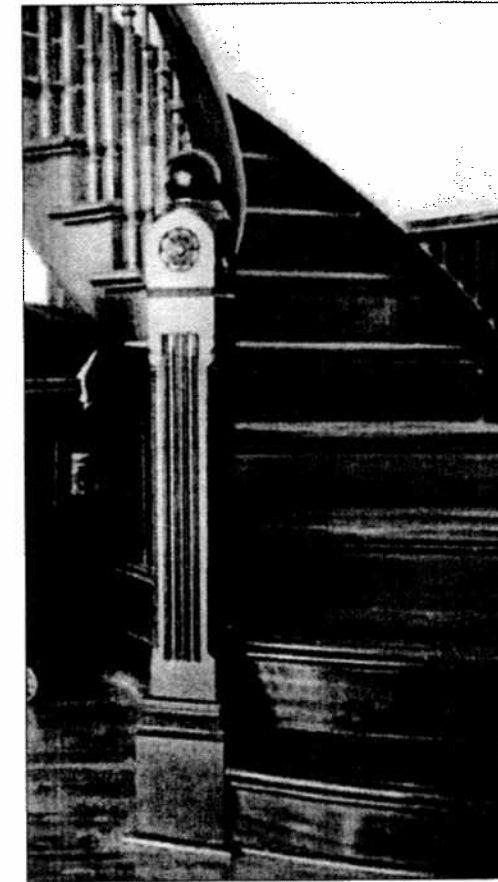
The building's most important interior feature is "Yondorf's Hall," which is identified on the exterior by a terra cotta plaque (top). This rare intact example of a 19th-century public hall still features a U-shaped balcony, oak paneling, and the original stage and proscenium arch.

The Building's Interior

The Yondorf Block and Hall was intended by August and Charles Yondorf to house various kinds of community activities, including club meetings, dances and theatrical events. Its upper floors contained meeting rooms and halls of varying sizes available for rental.

The finest was Yondorf's Hall itself. Located on the second floor, this two-story space is a well-preserved example of a 19th-century public hall theater. Exceptional in its physical integrity, it retains its original projecting stage, framed by a wooden and pressed-metal proscenium arch elaborately detailed with classical ornament, including engaged columns, swags and intertwining vines. The main floor is flat, rather than raked, allowing for dances and balls to be accommodated within the space as well as theatrical productions.

Wooden wainscoting, detailed with simple vertical grooving, ornaments the theater's walls. At the southeast and southwest corners of the room are curved wooden staircases with prominent newel posts, carved with bulls-eyes and incising, and turned-spindle railings. These staircases lead to a U-shaped balcony, fronted with oak paneling detailed with rosettes. The balcony is supported by iron tension rods, hanging from concealed trusses that span the building from east to west at the fourth-floor level.



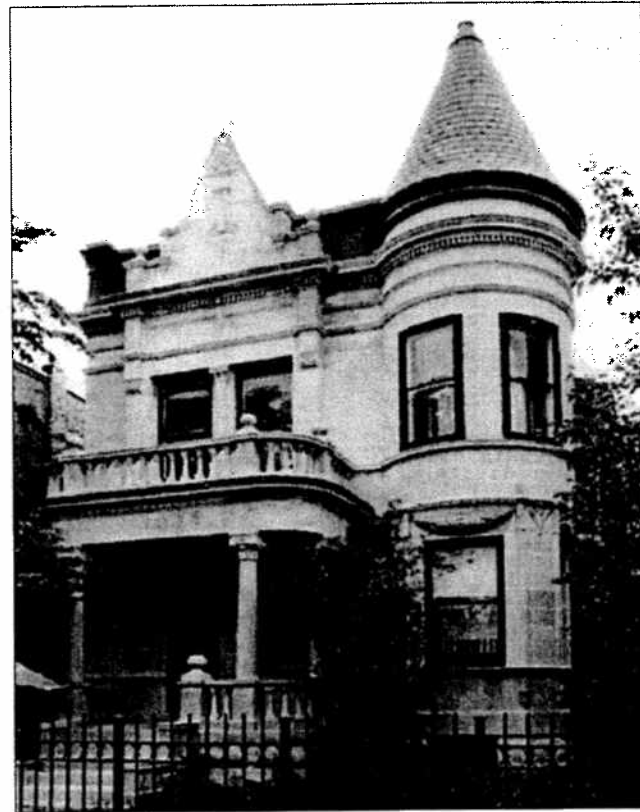
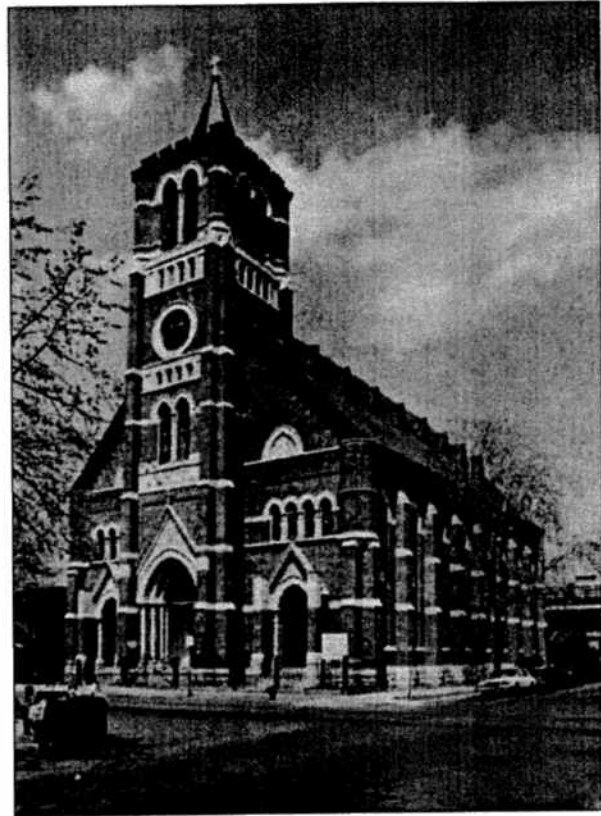
Other meeting rooms in the building were not as grand or as finely detailed as Yondorf's Hall. Original features in these rooms included wood paneled doors and wood window trim decorated with incising, bulls-eyes, and sawtooth patterns. Although much of this detailing was lost over the years, recent renovations have included new trim based on original designs.

The interior hall exhibits distinctive period detailing and craftsmanship. Pressed-metal swags and garlands ornament the proscenium (top and bottom right), while the curving wood staircases have boldly carved newel posts and railings (left).

The Architect: Frederick Ahlschlager

Frederick Ahlschlager, the architect of the Yondorf Block and Hall, was born in Mokena, Illinois, on March 24, 1858. He traveled widely in the United States and South America before attending college in Valparaiso, Indiana. He then studied engineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, graduating in 1878. Later that year, he moved to New Orleans where he worked in an architectural office for two years.

Returning to Chicago in 1880, Ahlschlager soon developed a successful practice designing a wide variety of buildings, including houses, factories, and churches. He was named a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1889 and served as Vice-president of the Chicago Architects' Business Association. He died on February 28, 1905.



Architect Frederick Ahlschlager designed a wide variety of buildings during the 1880s and '90s, including (clockwise, from above): the Baer Block (1887), St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church (1888), and a Logan Square residence (1904).

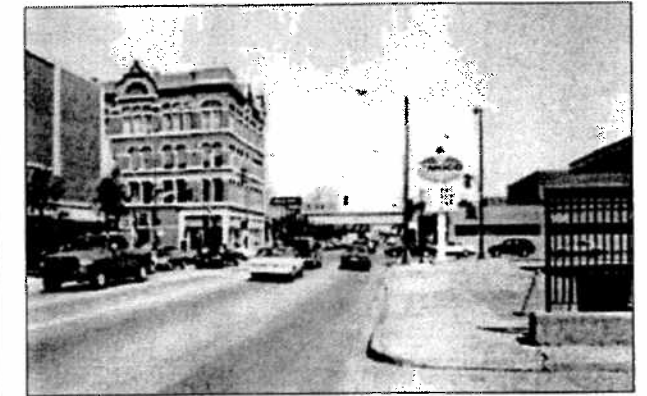
The Yondorf Block and Hall is Ahlschlager's most important surviving building. However, several other buildings of note designed by him remain. Among these are:

- Baer Block (1887), at the corner of Milwaukee & Chicago avenues
- St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church (1888), 2100 W. 21st St.
- Residence (1901), 3528 N. Janssen Ave.
- Residence (1904), 7236 S. Princeton Ave.
- Residence (1904), 2820 W. Logan Blvd.

North Avenue and Chicago's German-American Community

When built in 1887, the Yondorf Block and Hall was an impressive anchor for North Avenue, which was rapidly becoming one of the chief shopping streets for Chicago's North Side German community. Today, few buildings remain along the street to remind us of its past. The Yondorf Block and Hall is the best.

The second half of the 19th century was an age of tremendous growth for Chicago. By 1893, when the rebuilt metropolis dazzled the world with the World's Columbian Exposition and its "White



City," Chicago had grown into a metropolis of more than 1 million. Its new inhabitants came from all parts of Europe and created neighborhoods that, in their smells, appearances, and sounds, were reminders of their former homes.

Germans had been among the first Europeans to settle in Chicago, and as early as the 1850s they were one of the city's largest ethnic groups, rivaled only by the Irish. Many were leaving the German states in search of political freedom, in the wake of failed democratic revolutions there in 1848. By the Civil War, Germans made up 40.5 per cent of all foreign-born inhabitants in the city.

The 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s saw this number swell enormously, with over 300,000 German-speaking immigrants arriving in Chicago during those three decades. By 1900 native-born Germans and their children made up almost a quarter of the city's population. These new Chicagoans settled in all parts of the city. However, several neighborhoods became strongly German in population and character, including the Near Northwest Side, along Milwaukee Avenue between downtown and North Avenue; the area around Humboldt Park; and the Heart of Chicago neighborhood near Damen Avenue and 22nd Street (now Cermak Road).

But the most prominent local community of Germans was the North Side. As early as the 1850s, a German neighborhood had arisen north of Chicago Avenue and east of Clark Street, where many new immigrants had established breweries and other businesses. Others had established small farms in the area now known as the Old Town Triangle, west of Clark Street. After the Chicago Fire of 1871, many of these Germans moved farther north, to the Lincoln Park neighborhood and to Lake View, a suburb that was annexed to Chicago in 1889. At the turn of the century, Germans were a dominant force on the North Side, forming a majority of citizens in the area bounded by Division, Belmont, Lake Michigan, and the Chicago River. Wealthy German businessmen built fine homes near Lincoln Park and Lake Michigan, while middle- and working-class families lived in small, affordable cottages and flat buildings to the west.



From the 1880s through World War II, North Avenue was one of Chicago's most important German-American commercial streets, as shown by this photograph (above) of the bustling intersection of North and Ogden in 1929. The dramatic change to the Yondorf Block and Hall's surroundings is illustrated by two streetscape views taken around 1950 (top left) and in 1999 (top right), looking east from Clybourn Avenue. (The building's now-missing corner tower can be seen in the earlier photo.)

North Avenue itself became an important commercial street for this German-American community. It developed especially after 1887, the year of the Yondorf Block and Hall's construction, when newly established streetcar service along North made the area readily accessible. A tour brochure of 1938 called the street "the Unter den Linden of Chicago," referring to Berlin's famous boulevard of fashion and culture.

A former president of the North Avenue Business and Improvement Association (William Rau in a 1930 interview) recalled it as a bustling street by 1890, built up with dozens of stores, including clothiers, shoemakers, confectioners, tobacco shops, druggists, bakers, and grocers. Rau remembered: "The language spoken along the street was nine-tenths German and there was no occasion for folks from Trier, Luxembourg, the Rhineland and Bavaria to feel homesick." A columnist for the *Chicago Tribune* (Alex Small, 1957) remembered that during the street's heyday, "One could not get around North Avenue without that language [German]."

North Avenue also served a variety of other ethnic groups with old-world ties to Germany, including Swiss and Hungarian. In Harvey W. Zorbaugh's classic book on the sociology of Chicago's Near North Side, *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (1929), he wrote:

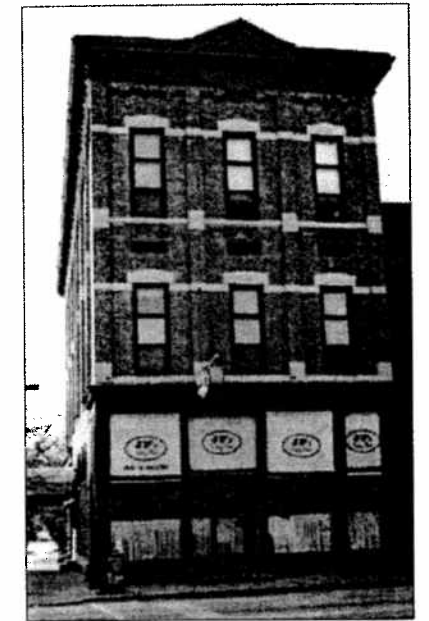
At the corner of Larrabee and North Avenue is the Immigrant State Bank (with names in German, Hungarian, and Italian, as well as in English), the Chicago Hungarian Athletic Association, a Hungarian daily, and a Hungarian barber shop.

Public Hall Buildings

Public hall buildings such as the Yondorf Block and Hall were once common in Chicago. In 1887, the year of Yondorf's construction, the Chicago city directory listed approximately 80 public hall buildings; by 1915, this figure had quintupled to over 450. Found most often on commercial streets, such as North or Milwaukee avenues, public hall buildings served a predominantly middle- and working-class clientele. Some were built specifically to house large clubs or trade unions. Others were built as speculative, for-profit structures with meeting rooms available for rent.

Regardless of ownership, most had first-floor retail spaces and meeting rooms on upper floors. Often these buildings were called "blocks," a 19th-century term for a speculative office building. Public halls served as centers for social and political meetings, fraternal gatherings, and live musical and theatrical productions. They were essential in the pre-radio, pre-cinema era of community activity and entertainment.

Public hall buildings evolved out of saloons, which were important businesses in the lives of many Chicagoans. Besides being places to drink, saloons were meeting places where the average



Chicagoan could learn local news, hear about jobs, and get a cheap noon meal. Saloons often had meeting rooms where social and political groups gathered for meetings and parties. Sometimes these rooms were behind the first-floor barroom or in the basement, but more often, they were located on upper floors. As Chicago grew and the need for meeting space for the city's many social, political, and fraternal organizations increased, buildings specifically constructed to house "public halls" were built at prominent intersections on many Chicago commercial streets.



Public hall buildings could vary in size and scale greatly. Many were relatively modest buildings, only a standard Chicago building lot wide and two or three stories in height. In appearance, they appeared indistinguishable from other commercial buildings found on Chicago streets. Surviving examples of this modest type of public hall building include:

- the former North Side Trade Union Hall (c. 1875), southwest corner of Clark and Hubbard streets
- Hammerstroem's Hall (1883), 1800 N. Halsted St.

Although most clubs, fraternal organizations, and societies in 19th-century Chicago rented meeting space, several well-established organizations built and maintained their own buildings. These often were among the grander-scaled buildings in their neighborhoods, extending over several building lots and reaching three or four floors in height. Although built by specific societies, they usually could be rented by other organizations. Masonic organizations built some of the most prominent of these private halls in Chicago. Others were built to house organizations with specific ties to ethnic groups. An important surviving example of this kind of public hall building is the Germania Club (1888),

Public halls were an important part of 19th-century culture in Chicago. Among the few surviving examples are (counter-clockwise, from above): Thalia Hall (1892; 1215 W. 18th St.), Hammerstroem's Hall (1883; 1800 N. Halsted St.), and Germania Club (1888; near the corner of Clark and North).

located just south of North Avenue on Clark Street, which was built by a leading German-American men's choral society.

Still other public hall buildings were built on a large scale, similar to those built by prominent clubs, but were strictly rental properties available for a wide variety of functions. The Yondorf Block and Hall is a fine example of this kind of public hall building. Another outstanding example is Thalia Hall (1892), located at 1215-25 W. 18th St. (designated a Chicago Landmark in 1989), which also contains a finely detailed theater. Others include:

- Flynn's Hall (1889), northeast corner of North and Damen
- Fasking Hall (c. 1890), 3012-14 S. Archer Ave.

German-Americans were well-known for their propensity to participate in group activities, and many public hall buildings could be found along German commercial streets such as North Avenue. A president of the Germania Club once commented, "Put three Germans together and in five minutes you'll have four clubs." A *Chicago Sun-Times* article from April 11, 1957 stated that:

Chicago's original German stronghold was North Avenue, from Clark to Clybourn. In that Teutonic neighborhood some 400 German singing, cultural, gymnast, fraternal and social organizations flourished.

By World War I, almost a dozen public hall buildings were located on North Avenue and nearby streets. Most were small in scale, including Folz's Hall at Larrabee Avenue (demolished) and Kern Hall (c. 1890), which remains at Hudson Avenue. The Yondorf Block and Hall was the largest and finest of those on North Avenue, and is an outstanding example of a public hall building that combines the speculative character of smaller public halls and saloons with the scale and visual exuberance of a private club.

Later History

Upon its opening, the Yondorf Block and Hall had Gloeckner's Saloon and Freeman's Grocery as first-floor tenants. It quickly became a favored place for meetings and dances held by fraternal and other social organizations. The 1890 Lakeside Directory of Chicago listed several societies that regularly held their meetings in the building, including the Ancient Order of United Workmen, the Independent Order of Knights and Ladies of Honor, the Order of Chosen Friends, the Grand Army of the Republic, the Independent Order of Foresters, the Knights of Pythias, and the Royal League. Later city directories mentioned additional organizations, including several Masonic lodges and the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, the Ladies of the Maccabees, the North American Union, the Royal Arcanum, the Order of Columbian Knights, the Protected Home Circle, the National Protective Life Association, the Order of Mutual Protection Lodges, and the Plattdeutsche Gilden.



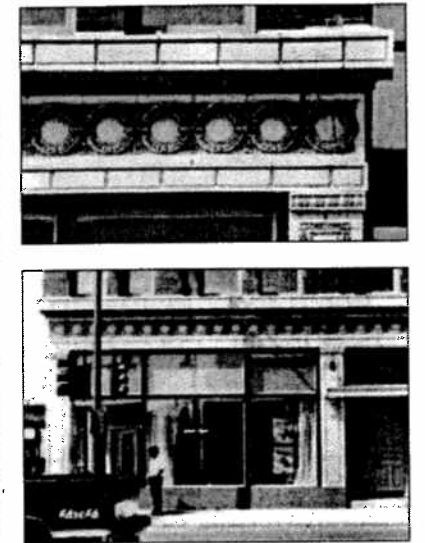
It also may have been the scene of radical political discussions in the tense years following the Haymarket Tragedy bombing of 1886, which played a key role in the organized labor movement. In *Anarchy and Anarchists*, an account of Chicago's Anarchist movement published in 1889, Michael J. Schaack, a Chicago policeman, wrote:

On Saturday night, December 1, 1888, a dance was in progress in Yondorf's Hall. Officer Lorch, of my command, called in to see what kind of a gathering it was. Entering the hall, he saw Kleinholdt with three young men, talking very busily. The officer approached near enough to hear that Kleinholdt was talking about dynamite, and finally heard him tell the young men how to make bombs, explaining the process in the same manner Engel had done. He also suggested that if his hearers would make bombs and put them "under the leafers of policemen," it would make the "bloodhounds jump."

In 1899, the physical setting of the Yondorf Block and Hall was greatly changed with the construction of the North Side rapid transit elevated tracks, which were built around the north and east sides of the building. Also, an elevated station was built at the building's northwest corner on Halsted, providing quick access to the Loop. Contrary to popular opinion, the curve in the elevated tracks was not built specifically to avoid the Yondorf Block and Hall, but to follow the various alleys through the neighborhood, a more easily obtained (and cheaper) right-of-way than buying and demolishing existing buildings.

Prudential Hall (1919-c. 1930)

In 1919, the Yondorf Block and Hall was bought by the Prudential Savings State Bank, the president of which was George K. Schmitt, a Cook County commissioner and former city alderman. At this



The Yondorf Block and Hall was bought in 1919 by the Prudential Savings State Bank, which remodeled the North Avenue facade with Classical-detailed, white terra-cotta storefronts (right, top and bottom). Plans to replace the building with a Classical Revival-style bank structure (left) were derailed in 1929 by the Great Depression.

time, the North Avenue storefronts were remodeled for the bank to the designs of architect Joseph Schuttler. These storefronts were clad with smoothly-finished brown granite and white glazed terracotta window and door surrounds, detailed in a bold Classical Revival style. Especially fine is the lavish cornice, with a frieze of interlocking circles and a variety of Greek details, including "egg-and-dart" and "bead-and-reel" moldings.

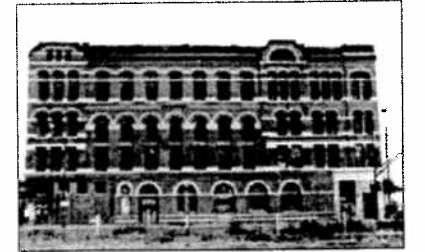
The Prudential Savings State Bank had intended to replace the building, now called Prudential Hall, with a new Classical Revival-style structure, but the Great Depression and the bank's subsequent failure intervened. However, the building continued to be a popular meeting place for social organizations through the 1920s and '30s. In 1935, one of Chicago's German newspapers, the *Abendpost*, published a list of German-language societies and organizations in the city. Several were listed as meeting at Prudential Hall, including the International Male Chorus, the Luxembourg Choral Society, the Nordica Ladies' Society, the Palatinate Ladies' National Society, the Swabian-Badensian Ladies' Society, and several lodges of the Hermann Sisters, a companion society to a popular German men's fraternal organization, the Sons of Hermann.

Sam's Liquors (1958-1985)

In 1958, Sam's Liquors, a retailer of wine and spirits, bought the building, which at the time held the Barrel House bar, and opened a store that became known citywide for its selection and prices. It is believed that the upper floor meeting rooms were closed at this time. In addition, many signs were installed that covered the building's first floor. Also, by 1965, the building's original corner tower, decorated with round-arched openings and a high pyramidal roof, had been taken down, as well as some pressed-metal ornament on the building's gables.

Urban renewal projects carried out during the 1960s and 70s changed the neighborhood surrounding the Yondorf Block and Hall, as many of the buildings south and east of it were demolished. In the 1980s, a proposal to widen North Avenue threatened the Yondorf Block and Hall itself with demolition. The street widening did not occur, nor did a proposed straightening of the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) elevated train tracks, which also threatened the building. Since the early 1990s, the new construction of small commercial buildings and residences has rapidly transformed this neighborhood.

As a result of the area's redevelopment the Yondorf Block and Hall is even more visually distinctive than it had been in its early years. Originally an impressive building anchoring a thriving commercial



For many years, the Yondorf Block and Hall was home to Sam's Liquors, a well-known wine and liquor retailer, whose signs covered much of the building's first floor, as seen in this c.1960 photograph (left). Following the store's departure in 1985 (above), the building was threatened with demolition.

street, it has now become a visual landmark on the edge of the Lincoln Park neighborhood. Set among lower-scaled buildings built within the last 30 years, the Yondorf Block and Hall serves as a "gateway" to the community for both motorists and pedestrians.

The Yondorf Block and Hall also has great visual presence to those riding on CTA trains. Red Line passengers leaving the North and Clybourn subway station see the building at the end of the block. More importantly, the building is a readily identifiable landmark to the thousands of CTA passengers that ride past the building daily on Brown and Purple Line trains.

Building Renovation (1989)

The threatened demolition of the Yondorf Block and Hall by Sam's Liquors for a replacement store during the early 1980s encouraged preservationists to list the building on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. In 1989, after Sam's Liquors relocated, the building was renovated and became the home for Affiliated Bank. The architects for the renovation were Fitzgerald Associates and the Office of John Vinci.

As part of the renovation, the Yondorf Block and Hall's exterior was restored. Although the original corner tower was not rebuilt, missing metalwork on several gables was recreated. Also, an

As part of a 1989 renovation, the exterior of the Yondorf Block and Hall was restored and an addition housing stairs and elevators was built on the east facade.



addition containing elevators and stairs was added to the building's east side. Inside, several of the former meeting rooms were renovated as office space and the theater was stabilized. Surviving wooden window and door trim, ornamented with boldly carved bulls-eyes, incising, and sawtooth detailing, provided models for new wooden trim added during this remodeling. The building's original entrance vestibule for the theater, with a mosaic-tile vestibule floor spelling "Yondorf's Hall," was preserved, but is not currently being used.

The Yondorf Block and Hall now is owned by LaSalle Bank and Steppenwolf Theater. This renowned Chicago theater company has administrative offices and rehearsal space on the building's upper floors. Once an important anchor for North Avenue and the German-American community that it served, the building remains almost alone as a visual reminder of this vital ethnic commercial street. The Yondorf Block and Hall today is a visual gateway to the Lincoln Park neighborhood, one of the city's most well-known historic neighborhoods.

APPENDICES

Criteria for Designation

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sections 2-120-620 and 630), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to recommend a building or district for landmark designation if the Commission determines that it meets two or more of the stated "criteria for landmark designation," as well as possesses a significant degree of its historic design integrity.

Based on the findings in this report, the following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend the Yondorf Block and Hall for designation as a Chicago Landmark.

Criterion 1: Critical Part of the City's Heritage

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois or the United States.

The Yondorf Block and Hall is a significant landmark in the social history of Chicagoans of German descent. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, North Avenue was an important commercial street in the heart of one of Chicago's most prominent German-American neighborhoods. The building is a rare physical reminder of the street's visual character, most of which was lost to urban renewal a generation ago.

In the years following the Chicago Fire of 1871, ethnic Germans made up one of the most dominant immigrant groups in Chicago, totaling almost a quarter of the city's population by 1900. Although they lived throughout the city during the 1880s and 1890s, Germans were most associated with Chicago's North Side, especially the Near North Side and Lincoln Park community areas.

North Avenue, separating these two neighborhoods, was an important commercial street to Chicago's German community. North was lined with small-scale commercial buildings housing a wide range of shops, businesses and professional services that catered to German-speaking Chicagoans. Rising four stories and located at North Avenue and Halsted Street, near the western end of the North Avenue commercial strip, the Yondorf Block and Hall was one of the street's most visually prominent buildings, built to house dances, plays and other cultural events and as a home for the community's fraternal organizations.

Criterion 4: Important Architecture

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship.

The Yondorf Block and Hall is a fine example of a large-scale, stylistically eclectic building of the Victorian age, relatively few of which have survived in Chicago. Along with buildings such as the Hotel St. Benedict Flats, the former Armour Institute main building, and the Germania Club, it reminds passersby today of earlier Chicagoans' taste for buildings of impressive scale and lavish decoration.

The Yondorf Block and Hall also is an important example of a building type significant in Chicago's social history, the public hall building. Sometimes built by fraternal organizations such as the Freemasons, more often by businessmen as commercial enterprises, public hall buildings could be found on most Chicago commercial streets during the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Many public hall buildings were modest in scale, indistinguishable on their exteriors from other commercial buildings. Others, including the Yondorf Block and Hall, were large, more imposing structures, resembling in their size and ornamentation the private club buildings built by Chicago's most prominent and elite societies. All had retail space on the first floor, while meeting rooms of varying sizes occupied upper floors. It was in buildings such as the Yondorf Block and Hall that the literally hundreds of social organizations and clubs common to 19th- and early 20th-century Chicago met.

The Yondorf Block and Hall is an outstanding example of a public hall building. Its exterior is large and imposing, finely detailed with beautifully crafted ornament in a variety of materials, including molded brick, carved stone, terra cotta and pressed metal. Its second-story theater, popularly known as "Yondorf's Hall" and complete with a proscenium-arch stage and U-shaped balcony, is a rare example of a 19th-century public hall theater and exceptional in the context of Chicago architecture.

Criterion 7: Unique Visual Feature

Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Chicago.

The Yondorf Block and Hall is an important visual landmark for Chicago's Near North Side communities, including the Lincoln Park neighborhood. Due to urban renewal efforts of the 1960s and early 1970s, the Yondorf Block and Hall is one of only a handful of 19th-century buildings remaining along North Avenue, while physically the most impressive. Its location at the North-Halsted-

Clybourn intersection gives it added prominence when viewed from the south or west, making it, as one newspaper reporter called it, "the gateway to Lincoln Park."

The Yondorf Block and Hall also is a distinctive landmark when seen from the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) elevated tracks, which curve around the building's north and east sides. Thousands of riders of CTA Brown and Purple Line trains know the building well, seeing it from several different angles as they pass by the building daily on their way to and from the Loop.

Integrity

The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and ability to express its historic community, architectural or aesthetic interest or value.

The exterior of the Yondorf Block and Hall retains its historic integrity to a high degree. The masonry walls have been well preserved, as has the window treatment. The windows have been replaced, but they maintain the original double-hung configuration. Architectural ornament, including terra-cotta and metal detailing, also has been retained.

The first-floor storefronts facing North Avenue were remodeled in 1919, when white glazed terra cotta storefronts were installed after the building was purchased by the Prudential Savings State Bank. Although not original, these storefronts are fine examples of craftsmanship in terra cotta and have historic significance of their own.

One of the most notable features of the Yondorf Block and Hall is its second-floor theater. This rare example of a small-scale 19th-century venue for plays, concerts and dances retains a high degree of physical integrity. It has its original proscenium-arch stage, built of wood and pressed metal, an encircling balcony, and twin wooden staircases leading from the orchestra level to the balcony. Besides these staircases, other surviving historic woodwork includes vertical-grooved wainscoting, wood paneling fronting the balcony, and several wood-paneled doors.

The theater's entrance, including a tiled first-floor vestibule and a staircase leading to the theater, still exists, although the vestibule and staircase have been sealed off and currently are inaccessible.

Other interior spaces, including the first-floor retail and upper-floor spaces, have been remodeled into modern banking and office areas. They retain their historic sense of scale but relatively few historic materials or detailing.

A new addition was constructed to the east in 1989. It is set back from the building's facade and does not detract from the original building's historic character.

Significant Historical and Architectural Features

Whenever a building or district is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the "significant historical and architectural features" of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based on its evaluation of the Yondorf Block and Hall, the Commission staff recommends that the significant historical and architectural features be identified as:

- all visible exterior elevations, including their rooflines
- the second-floor theater interior, including its proscenium arch, balcony, and staircases
- the first-floor entrance vestibule and staircase leading to the theater

Building Rehabilitation Issues

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks bases its review of all city-issued permits related to a landmark property on its adopted Guidelines for Alterations to Historic Buildings and New Construction, as well as the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings. The purpose of the Commission's review is to protect and enhance the landmark's significant historical and architectural features.

As noted in this report, the exterior appearance of the Yondorf Block and Hall is largely intact. The 1989 rehabilitation of the building followed Secretary of the Interior standards. The major exterior change associated with this rehabilitation, the east addition, was added to a party wall and is deferential in massing and setback to the historic fabric of the building in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior Standards. Future rehabilitation efforts should continue to respect the historic design character of the building.

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